

Amble Urban District

1897

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH.

GENTLEMEN,—In submitting my annual report for the year 1897, I note with pleasure steady improvement in the sanitation of the district, but there is yet much to be accomplished. I shall just briefly notice the matters which require your early and careful consideration.

1st. *The adoption of the Notification of Infectious Diseases Act.*—This recommendation has now been before the Council for the past seven years, so, I think, it has received sufficient consideration and you should now feel justified in acting. I have in previous reports explained to you and given my reasons as to why I consider its adoption a matter of importance to the well being of the community. All my previous arguments still hold good. If further proof be required I have to point to the danger there would arise in case of importation of infectious diseases such as small-pox. This disease I notice is prevalent in a district not far distant from here, and it is quite possible we may at any time have an outbreak in Amble. We should know that the only possible way to prevent the spread of that disease is an early recognition and strict isolation of the patient, together with vaccination or re-vaccination of all those in contact with the case. Supposing such a case occurred outside my practice, I have, as your Medical Officer, no right to any information about that case. The disease may in that way have spread beyond control, and yet I stand practically responsible for the prevention of the spread of such disease, yet having no authoritative information of its occurrence I think you will see the anomalous position I would be placed in in such an emergency. I therefore gentlemen, for the seventh time recommend you to do what nine-tenths of District Councils (both Urban and Rural) in England have already done.

2nd. *Infectious Diseases Hospital.*—This is almost a corollary to the foregoing. If my memory serves me right there is a resolution in the minutes authorising the purchase of an iron hospital in case of an importation of cholera. The same need exists for such an isolation hospital in other diseases besides cholera. Such a one is small-pox, and from the prolonged treatment it requires is a far more expensive disease to the community. At present we have no place in which we could isolate any infectious disease, no matter what the evil consequence which might attend or follow it. I, therefore, urge this matter on your serious consideration.

3rd. *Public Mortuary.*—I think it a disgrace to a shipping district like Amble, with a population of 4,500, to have no place to lay the remains of any one whose sad fate it is to come to an untimely end, and whose residence is not in the neighbourhood. I think the present system of utilising joiners' shops at the Harbourside should no longer be continued for such a purpose. It is high time such be procured for the community by the community. None of us would like the remains of any unfortunate friend treated as they have been in the past.

4th. *Public Urinals.*—The provision of these is a sanitary necessity. I again invite your attention to this matter. I need not urge this more strongly as doubtless it is a matter which is self evident and appeals to you individually.

5th. *Drinking Taps and Water Troughs.*—With a plentiful supply of good water these should be easily fixed in convenient positions in the town.

6th. *The closing up of the culvert in front of Central Hall.*—This, if public property, should be closed and a water trough provided in its place.

General Sanitation.—During the year various minor Sanitary Matters have received your attention, notably in the case of the insanitary condition of Victoria St. The recommendation which I placed before you in my interim report in conjunction with your Inspector, have in some instances been fully carried out, in others partially so, on the whole rendering the property much more sanitary. The gradual abolition of the ash pits

and the substitution of earth and water closets is a source of satisfaction to me and a sanitary improvement to the district.

The Scavenging of the town during the year has been most satisfactorily carried out. Various Improvements and alteration in the sewers, streets, etc., have been carried out and duly reported on by your Inspector (Mr Gibson). He has likewise given you an able report as to the sanitary state of the slaughter houses cow sheds, bake houses, etc., which I endorse. I have on a previous occasions drawn your attention to the milk supply and distribution. This is a matter of considerable sanitary importance as it is well known that it may be the carrier of various Infectious and Contagious Diseases. After mature consideration, and having seen it distributed in other towns of similar size, I am of opinion that a large properly made can with a tap fitted on to a neatly constructed vehicle (I mean one specially made would be at once both neat and clean, and therefore free from many disadvantages of the present system. I would also recommend the periodical inspection of the premises and cows from which the milk supply is obtained, whether within or without the urban district. For the latter purpose, I mean the inspection of cows, a veterinary surgeon's opinion would be of value. I have specially dwelt on this matter as it is well-known that the germs of disease may be carried to the consumer from this source.

Water Supply.—This continues to give every satisfaction both as to quantity and quality. As a matter of precaution it might be well to have a periodical analysis, thereby increasing or otherwise our confidence as to its quality.

Death Rate.—During the past year 65 deaths were registered in the district, giving on an estimated population of 4,500 a death rate of 14.4 per thousand, which is very satisfactory considering the industrial character of the community. If we eliminate 3 due to accidental causes we get the net death rate of 14 per thousand.

Ages.—Of the 65 deaths, 25 are recorded as under one year, giving an infantile mortality of 5.5 per thousand. When we take into account the fact that several of these children merely survived birth, and that in the majority of the others death was due to constitutional causes, no further comment from me is necessary. At the other end of the table we have 15 deaths in persons who have exceeded the age of 65 years, a few having reached the limit of 80 years.

Zymotic.—From zymotic causes there have been 4 deaths, giving a zymotic death rate of .8 per thousand. One was due to diphtheria, the cause of which from a sanitary point of view did not seem apparent. Due precaution was taken to have everything disinfected about the premises, and no further case occurred. Two deaths were registered as due to typhoid fever. In one the cause appeared to be due to the defect of a sewer, which was promptly put into a sanitary condition as soon as attention was directed to that source. No other case occurred, as far as I am aware, in that neighbourhood. With reference to the other case there was no apparent cause, the cesspool in that neighbourhood having been removed and a proper sewer substituted some time previously. One was due to puerperal fever, the cause of which does not seem apparent. The other causes of mortality are stated in proper columns in the accompanying schedule, and do not require any special comment.

Birth-rate.—The number of births registered during the year was 143, of which 68 were males and 75 were females, giving a birth-rate of 31.7 per thousand.

Health.—The health of the district, in the period under notice, has been excellent. There has been no epidemic of any of the Infectious Diseases. We may fairly congratulate ourselves on the low mortality, high birth-rate, general good health, and freedom from any epidemic in the district, as well as the satisfactory sanitary condition of the town.

I trust that my various recommendations will be carried out during the year, and that my next annual report will have those hardy annuals eliminated, and be in every way more satisfactory than the present.—I am, your obedient servant,

W. SMYTH, M.B., C.M.

